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ABSTRACT

Annually, during orientation, a questionnaire prepared by the American Council on Education is administered to the entering freshmen class at the University of South Carolina. (This questionnaire also is administered at approximately 75 two-year colleges, 245 four-year colleges, and 44 universities across the U.S.) The data collected on the questionnaire yields summary results on entering freshmen at U.S.C. as well as weighted normative data from the participating universities. This document focuses on the item in the questionnaire termed "current political preference." The document examines the political preferences of U.S.C. entering freshmen over a six-year period between 1969 and 1974 and provides a comparison with national norms. In addition, analyses on the bases of sex and state residency are given. The document concludes by summarizing the trends observed over the six-year period. Findings are that in 1969, U.S.C entering freshmen were less "left" and more "middle-of-the-road" and "right" in their political preferences than were their national counterparts. However, the extent of differences has diminished between 1969 and 1974, with U.S.C. and the national norms becoming almost identical in 1974. (Author/KE)

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ED108556

SUBJECT: Current Political Preferences of Entering Freshmen at the University of South Carolina, 1969 - 1974

RESEARCH NOTES NO. 24-75 May, 9, 1975

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RESEARCH NOTE NO. 24-75

Subject: Political Preferences of Entering Freshmen at the University of South Carolina, 1969-1974.

Nature and Scope of the Study

Annually during orientation, a questionnaire prepared by the American Council on Education is administered to the entering freshman class at University of South Carolina, and other institutions of higher education throughout the United States. (Approximately 75 two-year colleges, 245 four-year colleges, and 44 universities). The data collected on the A.C.E. questionnaire yield summary results on entering freshmen at U.S.C. and weighted normative data from the participating universities. The following report is part of a series of reports drawn from analyses of these data. This report focuses on the item in the questionnaire termed "current political preference."

The report examines the political preferences of U.S.C. entering freshmen over a six year period between 1969 and 1974 and provides a comparison with national norms. In addition, analyses on the basis of sex, and state residency[1] are given. This report concludes by summarizing the trends observed over the six year period.

This study up-dates Research Notes No. 10 of June 1, 1972 entitled, Current Political Preferences of Entering Freshmen at the University of South Carolina, 1969-1971.

[1] Data by state residency are not available for 1974; therefore, this analysis is based on political preference information for the period 1969 - 1973.

Table 1: Comparison of Current Political Preferences of U.S.C. Entering Freshmen with National Norms, 1969 - 1974[2].

U.S.C.	1969 N=2360	1970 N=3399	1971 N=2260	1972 N=2054	1973 N=1725	1974 N=1623
Left	26.1	30.0	38.9	35.0	31.6	34.1
Middle of the Road	46.9	49.0	45.6	50.0	52.2	51.2
Right	27.0	21.0	15.5	15.1	16.3	14.7

National Norms	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974
Left	35.8	41.0	44.1	39.2	37.8	33.9
Middle of the Road	41.0	41.9	41.9	45.2	48.1	51.6
Right	23.2	17.2	14.1	15.7	14.0	14.4

[2]Due to slight alterations in the responses to this item on the A.C.E. questionnaire over the six year period, 1969 - 1974, data in all tables of this report were converted to "left," "middle-of-the-road," and "right" to facilitate comparison.

ACTUAL RESPONSES WERE:

1969	1970 - 1974	Converted Responses
Left	Far Left	Left
Liberal	Liberal	
Middle-of-the-Road	Middle-of-the-Road	Middle-of-the-Road
Moderately Conservative	Conservative	Right
Strongly Conservative	Far Right	

1. The data presented in Table One follow a definite pattern. Between 1969 and 1971, there was a trend for entering freshmen to be more liberal and less conservative than in previous years. This trend peaked in 1971, at which time a reversal took place as the percentage of students expressing a liberal preference declined and the percentage expressing a middle-of-the-road preference increased. Conservative views seemed to stabilize. This was both a local and national trend. The relationship between U.S.C. data and National Norms can be more clearly seen in Graph One on the next page. The graph also shows clearly how U.S.C. students have moved toward national norms during the period studied.
2. In general, during the period 1969 through 1973, U.S.C. entering freshmen were less "left" and more "middle-of-the-road" and "right" in their political preferences than their national counterparts. In 1974, however, U.S.C. and national findings were almost identical.
3. Approximately one-half of U.S.C. entering freshmen held a "middle-of-the-road" preference during the period 1969 through 1974. Additionally about one-fourth of U.S.C. entering freshmen held a "left" or "right" point of view in 1969. By 1971, however, one-third of U.S.C. entering freshmen held a "left" point of view as compared to about one-sixth holding a "right" political preference. The 1971 ratios held true from 1972 through 1974.
4. Presently at U.S.C., 3 out of 6 students hold a "middle-of-the-road" preference; 2 out of 6 students hold a "left" preference; and one out of six hold a "right" preference.

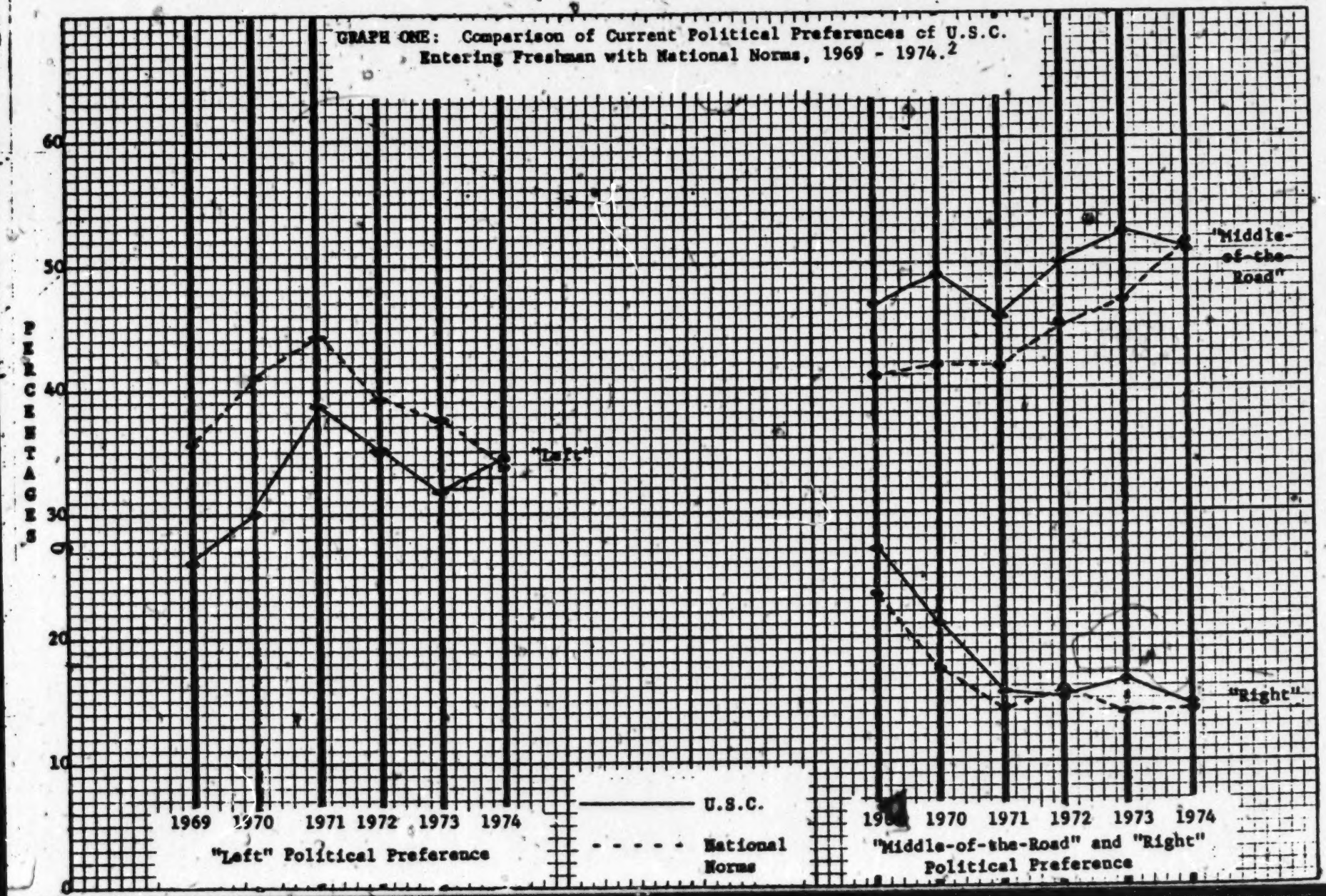
GRAPH ONE: Comparison of Current Political Preferences of U.S.C. Entering Freshman with National Norms, 1969 - 1974.[2]
PERCENTAGES
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
"Left"
"Middle-of-the-Road"
"Right"
1969 1970 1971 1972 1973 1974
"Left" Political Preference
U.S.C.
National Norms
1970 1971 1972 1973 1974
"Middle-of-the-Road" and "Right" Political Preference

Table 2: Comparison of Current Political Preferences of U.S.C. Entering Freshmen by Sex, 1969 - 1974.

U.S.C. Male	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974
Left	26.9	31.2	40.7	37.8	32.5	35.9
Middle-of-the-Road	45.3	46.9	42.4	45.7	49.1	47.7
Right	27.8	22.0	16.8	16.6	18.4	16.5

U.S.C. Female	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974
Left	24.9	28.4	36.5	31.1	30.7	32.2
Middle-of-the-Road	49.2	51.8	49.6	55.8	55.4	55.0
Right	26.0	19.8	14.0	13.1	13.9	12.9

1. Between 1969 and 1971, both male and females followed the trend for entering freshmen to be more liberal and less conservative than in previous years. In similar fashion this trend peaked in 1971 for both males and females, at which time an increase took place in the percentage citing a "middle-of-the-road" view while the percentage expressing a conservative view stabilized.
2. Males were more inclined than females to express an extreme political preference. This finding was observed to be true in every case during the period studied.
3. Females were more inclined than males to express a "middle-of-the-road" political preference.

Table 3: Comparison of Current Political Preferences of U.S.C. Entering Freshmen by State Residency, 1969 - 1973.

U.S.C. In-State Students	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973
Left	31.8	30.8	39.3	34.7	31.3
Middle-of-the-Road	34.4	49.1	45.5	50.5	52.2
Right	33.9	20.1	15.2	14.7	16.4

U.S.C. Out-of-State Students	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973
Left	31.7	36.9	37.2	35.7	32.9
Middle-of-the-Road	43.8	45.4	45.8	47.9	52.0
Right	24.5	17.7	17.0	16.5	15.2

1. Between 1969 and 1971, both in-state students and out-of-state students followed the trend for entering freshmen to express more liberal and less conservative views than in previous years. This trend peaked in 1971 for both in-state and out-of-state students, as a larger percentage of students favored a middle-of-the-road position.

2. Throughout the six year period, approximately one-third of both in-state and out-of-state students expressed a "left" political preference. In 1969, approximately one-third of the in-state students expressed a "left," "middle-of-the-road" or "right" political preference. By contrast, nearly one-half of the out-of-state students expressed a "middle-of-the-road" political preference with one-fourth expressing a "right" political preference. By 1974, the differences between in-state and out-of-state were negligible with one-third of the students expressing a "left" political preference, one-half expressing a "middle-of-the-road" political preference, and one-sixth expressing a "right" political preference.

CONCLUSIONS:

In 1969, U.S.C. entering freshmen were less "left" and more "middle-of-the-road" and "right" in their political preferences than were their national counterparts. However, the extent of difference has diminished between 1969 and 1974, with U.S.C. and national norms becoming almost identical in 1974.

A definite pattern was evident throughout the period 1969 - 1974. Between 1969 and 1971, there was a trend for entering freshmen to be more liberal and less conservative than in previous years. This trend peaked in 1971, at which time a reversal took place as the percentage of students expressing a liberal preference decreased. Conservative views seemed to stabilize while the percentage of students opting for a middle-of-the-road position increased. This finding occurred as both a local and national trend which did not appear to be related to either sex or state residency. The research did show that female students were less prone to extreme political views than were males.

Since these findings have implications for student reactions within the academic community, it is recommended that the political preferences of entering students continue to be monitored. The short and long range effects of University life on student political preferences should also be studied.